

Eileen Weiser (member, State Board of Education)
House Education Committee testimony on HB 5409-18
April 14, 2016

I commend the House Education Committee on this thoughtful bill. It defines the challenges that schools face, and clearly articulates the safety and educational needs Michigan children deserve. Like "Matt's Law" in 2011, which required all schools to adopt the State Board's anti-bullying policy by mid 2012, it emphasizes the need for significant change in school culture and training. It's much stronger than the State Board's 2006 policy on seclusion and restraint, and hopefully will be implemented with adequate training, fidelity and school-wide commitment.

I have two concerns though:

1. The State Board's (and Michigan Department of Education's) model anti-bullying policy clearly prohibits bullying based on any gender issue. Yet we're hearing from LGBTQ advocates that school adoption of that policy has not positively impacted children struggling with gender issues. While no Michigan student has died of seclusion or restraint since 2003, it's hard to know how many schools have already trained their staff properly in the techniques and strategies outlined in this legislation. I would ask that the House consider whether the legislation is strong enough as written to lead schools over the training and implementation hurdles that have kept the 2006 SBE policy from being effective.

2. The legislation recognizes that it's the general classroom teacher most in need of adequate training that allows them to manage their classrooms safely. I would ask that the House consider how schools will ensure all teachers have this training over the next three to five years. Special education teachers and other support staff should know these techniques already. It's the classroom teacher who is most in need of new strategies and techniques to work with all their students to create a safe learning environment for every child.

Respectfully submitted,
Eileen Weiser